



# THE ALABAMA VETERAN

FALL 2021 ISSUE



**ADVA**

**NEWSLETTER**

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**ADVA**

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

*"Proudly Serving  
America's Finest"*

# COMMISSIONER'S CORNER



## COMMISSIONER KENT DAVIS

As the day dawned on September 11, 2001, America had reason to feel secure. With the Cold War a fading memory, a booming economy, and the arrival of a new millennium, the country enjoyed the last days of summer in relative peace.

By the end of the day, everything had changed.

It's been two decades, but we all remember what happened that day. We'll never forget.

At 8:46 a.m. (EDT), American Airlines Flight 11 struck the World Trade Center's North Tower in New York City. It would collapse at 10:28 a.m.

Millions of Americans witnessed United Airlines Flight 175 crash into the South Tower on live television at 9:03 a.m. (EDT). It collapsed an hour later.

Shortly afterward, the west wall of the Pentagon in Washington D.C. was hit by American Airlines Flight 77 at 9:37 a.m. (EDT).

And it was just after 10 a.m. (EDT) that United Airlines Flight 93 crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Though everyone onboard was killed, the American heroes who fought back against the hijackers saved countless lives.

There were approximately 3,000 people killed that morning. We all remember where we were and what we were doing when we first heard the news. We all know how that day changed our lives.

For me, September 11 changed life entirely. I was working at a large private law firm in Atlanta at the time but was also in the U.S. Navy Reserve. I had a good feeling I'd likely get called up for active duty, but my wife was actually who got the call. She was sent to Europe to assist with intel work, and we had a year-and-a-half-old daughter at the time, so I became Mr. Mom for several months.

It wasn't until mid to late 2002 that I received a call from a retired colonel in the Army and he asked if I was interested in being an attorney for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Something stirred in me because I still hadn't been called for active duty, so I took the opportunity. I stayed with Homeland Security until 2016, participating in its formation and serving on the staff of former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge. I was eventually deployed, receiving mobilization orders to Qatar in 2006 and Afghanistan in 2012. But this is just my story, and while yours might be different I'd bet there are some similarities.

It's hard to believe it's already been 20 years. But as we reflect as a nation — and you reflect personally — remember how you felt that day. Remember the unity our nation held. Remember the fight.



## **ADVA**

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### **ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT**

Robert Horton

### **DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL**

Beverly Gebhardt

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Sissy Louise Moore—Program Manager

### **VETERANS HOMES PROGRAMS**

Kim Justice—Executive Director

### **ALABAMA G.I. DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

Kayla Kyle—Program Manager

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## **ADVA APPOINTS PROGRAM MANAGER TO LEAD VETERAN WELL-BEING PROJECTS**

Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) Commissioner Kent Davis has sworn in Sissy Louise Moore to serve as the department's new veterans well-being program manager.

She will serve as primary ADVA coordinator for Alabama's Challenge for Preventing Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) and will coordinate and manage other programs that support veterans well-being, such as substance use and homeless veterans issues, AlaVetNet initiatives, and other veteran outreach services related projects or events.

"We can't say enough about our excitement for Sissy Louise to join our team. Her background and expertise are exactly what we've needed for our veterans well-being programs," said ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis. "I cannot stress enough the importance of tackling issues like veterans suicide, substance use and homelessness. We're serious about addressing these issues and directing Alabama's veterans who might be facing these challenges to great resources statewide. Sissy Louise will be a substantial benefit with these initiatives."



Sissy Louise joins ADVA after spending the last eight years as the University of South Alabama Mitchell Cancer Institute's Oncology Navigation Advocate, linking physicians, patients, and family members to education, support, and community resources. She also developed and implemented "LIVING WELL... Life After Cancer," a series of health education programs to

support patients transitioning to survivorship. Earlier in her career, Sissy Louise implemented three pilot community health programs through South Alabama's Regional Planning Commission's Area Agency on Aging grants from the U.S. Administration on Aging.

"As a widow of a veteran, veterans know better than anyone else the price of freedom, for they've suffered the scars of war," she said. "Our veterans have given their best for all of us and we must continue to do our best by them. We can offer them no better tribute than to protect what they have done for us. That is our duty."



## AROUND THE STATE

# GOV. IVEY SIGNS PROCLAMATION TO HIGHLIGHT NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS MONTH

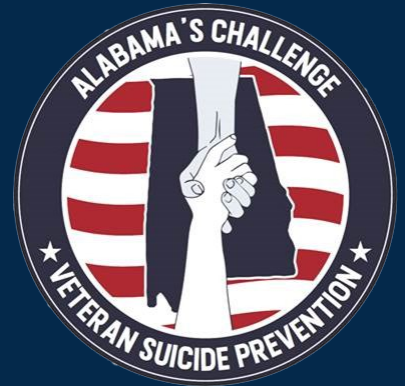
Gov. Kay Ivey has signed a proclamation highlighting September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, and the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) is working to continue raising awareness on how servicemembers, veterans, and families (SMVF) can protect themselves and loved ones from this complex health issue.

A continuing stigma with mental illness is a tragic reality for veterans, with approximately 17 veterans dying by suicide per day. In Alabama, the veteran suicide rate is even higher than the national veteran average and significantly higher than the civilian average.

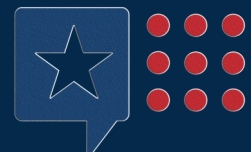
Recently released data shows nearly 18% of those who died by suicide in Alabama are veterans, though only 9.1% of Alabamians have served. Male veterans die by suicide at a rate 1.3 times civilian counters, and for women veterans it is 2.1 times higher.

This crisis led to the creation of Alabama's Challenge, an initiative targeted to inform SMVF of resources to ultimately prevent suicide. During the month of September and further into the fall, Alabama's Challenge plans to release new PSAs for TV and radio and other informational materials that will help SMVF who may be facing a crisis.

For more information, visit [www.va.alabama.gov](http://www.va.alabama.gov) and click "Suicide Prevention" under the Resources tab.



**Veterans  
Crisis Line**



**1-800-273-8255  
PRESS 1**

## ALABAMA G.I. DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM EXPANDS TO INCLUDE PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

The Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program now allows more inclusivity after Gov. Kay Ivey recently signed House Bill 554.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Kerry Rich, R-Guntersville, extends the Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program to include comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs (CTPs) for students with intellectual disabilities. Previously, the scholarship program was only permitted to pay for college-level classes.

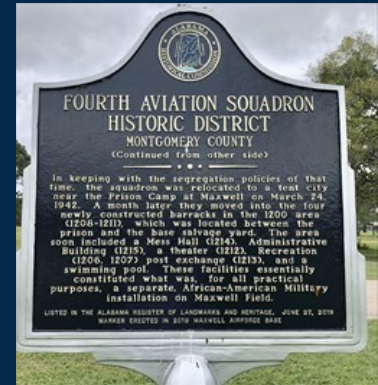
The scholarship program, which is administered by the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA), will help cover the costs of the student's tuition, required textbooks, and instructional fees for classes included in the CTP, regardless of whether it is a college-level class. Only programs at public four-year institutions in Alabama are authorized under the new law – community colleges, private schools, and out-of-state schools are not included.

A CTP is a postsecondary degree, certificate or non-degree program sponsored by a college that is approved by the U.S. Department of Education and is designed to support students with intellectual disabilities as they continue to receive instruction in academic, career, and independent living to prepare for gainful employment. The EAGLES program at Auburn University and PASSAGE USA at the University of South Alabama are examples of Alabama CTPs.

# 4TH AVIATION SQUADRON HONORED AT MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE WITH HISTORICAL MARKER

Maxwell Air Force Base honored the historic 4th Aviation Squadron on June 10, the 70th anniversary of the squadron's establishment. A historical marker was unveiled to honor the 4th Aviation Squadron, which was one of the first African-American units established in Alabama. Though the official mission was stated as "security," primary duties involved service as janitors, chauffeurs, truck drivers, foot messengers, and hospital and mess hall attendants. The squadron also included other African-American soldiers who were temporarily attached to the unit while waiting for assignment within the Eastern Flying Training Command.

In keeping with the segregation policies of that time, the 4th Aviation Squadron was relocated to a tent city near the Prison Camp at Maxwell in March 1942. A month later, they moved into the four newly constructed barracks in the 1200 area, which was located between the prison and the base salvage yard. The area soon included a mess hall, administrative building, a theater, recreation, post exchange, and a swimming pool. These facilities essentially constituted what was, for all practical purposes, a separate, African-American Military installation on Maxwell Field.



# THANK YOU!



Exercise equipment is coming to the domiciliary exercise room at Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home! The exciting news came in late June after the facility received a check for over \$11,000 from Logan Martin Lakefest and Boat Show!

Lakefest donated to many other organizations in the community, with \$39,000 split among various organizations. Pictured are Justin Hogeland, Assistant Administrator Cheryl Newton, Director Hiliary Hardwick, DOM Delegating Nurse Misty Thompson, and Eric Housh.

We want to send a special thank you to American Legion Post 0347 for donating six blenders and several boxes of Bingo prizes and snacks to Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in late June! Pictured above are members of Post 0347, Jefferson County Veteran Service Office Angela Hunter, CRLHSVH Director Hiliary Hardwick, and Activities Director Shauna Carleton.



## AROUND THE STATE

# PAIR OF WORLD WAR II VETERANS CELEBRATE BIRTHDAYS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS



Family and friends of Robert Kohn filled the room on July 27 to celebrate the beloved Army veteran's 99th birthday.

Martha Poole Simmons, a volunteer with the American Red Cross, presented Kohn with a commendation from Gov. Kay Ivey and a commemorative coin from the ADVA.

Kohn served in combat in the Army's Infantry for 52 days in the World War II Battle of the Bulge and the Battle of the Rhineland under General George Patton. He was in the 3rd Army, 90th Infantry Division, 359 Battalion, Company M (Heavy Weapons). Company M used 81 mm mortars and 30-caliber machine guns.



As friends and family celebrated World War II veteran Moses Batie's 100th birthday on August 1, Pike County Veterans Service Officer Randy Ross presented Batie with a commendation from Gov. Kay Ivey.

Batie enlisted in the Navy in 1945 and served aboard the USS Chief, a minesweeper in the Pacific Theater. On September 8, 1945, the USS Chief sailed to Japan and swept for minefields in preparation for the arrival of occupation forces following Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945.

## MT. VERNON POLICE OFFICER STANDS AT ATTENTION IN POURING RAIN TO PAY RESPECT FOR WWII VETERAN'S FUNERAL

A photo of one South Alabama veteran honoring another went viral in late July when the a World War II veteran was to rest at the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort.

Private First Class Robert Lee Serling was 100 years old when he passed away on June 5. He was one of the few Black men to fight in the Pacific.

Mount Vernon Police Officer Newman Brazier stood in the pouring rain to honor Serling. Brazier was unaware that his commitment and respect would bring him national attention.

"That's what vets do," Brazier told NBC 15. "I felt that he wanted to be acknowledged. I felt that being from a small town like Mount Vernon and that he can do what he did, and he can pass and nobody realize it and not respect it. It was my point to let everyone in that area know that he was there, he was passing through, even if it was for the last time."



Source: NBC 15

## VA SECRETARY VISITS ALABAMA CITIES TO PROMOTE COVID-19 VACCINE

Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Kent Davis met with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Denis McDonough during his visit to Alabama on June 17. McDonough stopped in Montgomery to visit a vaccination clinic coordinated by the VA in conjunction with the American Legion Department of Alabama Convention.

"I always appreciate the opportunity to meet with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and discuss the great things our two agencies are doing for veterans in Alabama," Commissioner Davis said. "This vaccination clinic is another example of the opportunities Director Amir Farooqi and the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) team offer Veterans and the general public in central Alabama, and we look forward to continue working with the VA in making sure Alabama's finest receive the benefits they've earned."

McDonough's visit to Montgomery followed a morning stop in Birmingham on Thursday where he toured the Birmingham VA Medical Center and visited a vaccination clinic at Jackson-Olin High School with Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff.



## VA NOW OFFERING DISABILITY COMPENSATION TO VETERANS EXPOSED TO BURN PITS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began processing disability claims Aug. 2 for asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis on a presumptive basis based on presumed particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia and certain other areas – if these conditions manifested within 10 years of a qualifying period of military service.

VA conducted the first iteration of a newly formed internal VA process to review scientific evidence to support rulemaking, resulting in the recommendation to consider creation of new presumptions of service connection for respiratory conditions based on VA's evaluation of a National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine report and other evidence.

The process concluded that particulate matter pollution is associated with chronic asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis for veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations beginning Aug. 2, 1990 to the present, or Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Syria or Djibouti beginning Sept. 19, 2001 to the present. VA's review also concluded that there was sufficient evidence to presume that these veterans have been exposed to particulate matter.

The Southwest Asia theater of operations refers to Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the airspace above these locations.



# VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER OF THE YEAR AWARDS PRESENTED BY AMERICAN LEGION



**Jim McIntire, District I**

"Jim McIntire possesses an exemplary degree of professionalism and integrity in performance of duty. Jim shows understanding and compassion toward his clientele when working their claims, dedicating time, energy and every available resource to ensure they receive the best assistance he can offer. During his years of service, Jim has mastered navigating the complex process of submitting claims, becoming an expert at applying federal and state law and department procedure. He displays the finest administrative skills on case management, evident by his commendable success rate of claims being awarded by the VA. DeKalb County are fortunate to have a dedicated, honest and productive service officer in Jim McIntire."

-Tim Edgil, District I Manager



**Matthew Hobbie, District II**

"Matthew Hobbie is a stellar performer who exudes with confidence, and he operates from a consistently high level in performing his duties as Autauga County Service Officer. He has gained the admiration and respect of his veterans because he is unwavering in his compassion and care for them. He considers it an honor to serve, and he works hard for every veteran he represents. He has an active outreach program and takes every opportunity to share information with the community about the services his office provides. He has also helped to train other county Veterans Service Officer and he is respected by his peers and he superiors. Hobbie is dependable and trustworthy and is an excellent representative for the ADVA."

-Rogers Wilson, District II Manager



**Brian Foshee, District III**

"Brian has made immeasurable impacts over the past year as a passionate advocate for the veterans in Covington County and Conecuh County and is willing to go that an extra step. He is active in his community, trying to reach as many veterans to provide benefits information. Brian is an individual that gives much attention to detail on every claim he submits and is willing to take on difficult cases and sees them to completion with the majority being successful benefit awards. It is achievements like this that deserve honor, award, and recognition."

-Lynda Jenkins, District III Manager



**Paula Lawson, Appeal & Review**

"The main thing that I will say about Paula is that over the past year she has exhibited a willingness to be flexible and an eagerness to learn new things and then apply that knowledge to making our office work most efficiently." -Mark Sullivan, Appeal & Review Division Manager

## SHELBY COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE RELOCATES TO NEW COLUMBIANA LOCATION

The Shelby County Veterans Service Office transitioned to a new office space in mid-July. The new office is located at 202 West College Street in Columbiana.

The new location provides a larger workspace, a more accessible location with better parking accommodations, and improved internet and Wi-Fi access.

Office hours for the new location remain the same — Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) has Veterans Service Offices in 60 of Alabama's 67 counties. These offices provide veterans with free services, including counseling, hands-on assistance in submitting applications for VA compensation & pension claims, and assisting with all other state and federal veterans benefits and services.

Locations and hours for each office can be on our website — [va.alabama.gov](http://va.alabama.gov).